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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the findings from an Estonian study that used the Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique to compare family relationships in families of 47 children (ages 7-10) with siblings with mental retardation to family relationships in families of 43 typical children. The family size ranged from four to five members, so there were two to three children in each family. During the study, male and female figurines of three sizes were placed on the table. Each child was asked to place the figurines on a sheet of white plastic 10 x 10 cm chessboard squares so the child could see all the members of the family. If any further instructions were needed, children were told to place the figurines as they saw the relations between the family members. Then the distances between the members of the configuration were computed. While comparing the distance value between Ego and other family members one at a time, there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups. Some differences were found between sexes, with boys having significantly longer distances with their fathers and mothers. (Contains 23 references.) (CR)

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Relations Between The Family Members According To Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique: Comparative Study In Families In Control Group And With Mentally Retarded Children

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Abstract

Sculpture methods have been used to obtain information about the real and ideal family structure. In marital and family diagnosis and therapy the Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique (KFST) is widely known.

A total of 90 children, seven to ten year olds, took part in the study. 47 of them had a mentally retarded sibling and 43 formed a control group without a disabled sibling in the family. The family size ranged from four to five members, so there were two to three children in the family. Most families were complete, i.e. each having two parents. The mean age of the respondent child in the families with a disabled child was 8,68 years and in the control group 8,30 years. Children with disabled sisters or brothers were recruited by special schools and day care centres. The children in the control group were chosen from the same school where the siblings of the disabled children studied. All children had to take the tests individually. The male and female figurines of three sizes were placed on the table. The child was asked to place the figurines on a white sheet of plastics of 10 x 10 cm squares chessboard for the child to see all the members of the family. If any further instructions were needed, children were told to place the figurines as they see the relations between the family members. Then the distances between the members of the configuration were computed.

While comparing the distance value between Ego and other family members, one at a time, there was no statistically significant difference between the disabled group and the control group, neither with respect to the children's representation of the current state (real), nor according to their representation of ideal (wished) relations. There was, however, greater variation with respect to the mother and father in the control group according to their present experiences (real). The

children in both groups mostly wished they had a closer relationship with their parents, but siblings of mentally retarded children, on the contrary, wished relatively more distant relationships with mother, but this difference was not significant either.

We did not find significant differences between families with disabled and control families, but we found significant differences in family relations by sexes. It is clear that there are significantly greater differences in boys comparing with girls' relations with fathers, mothers and in their family mean distances

Overall the most obvious result, when comparing the disabled and the control group is that siblings of mentally retarded children and other children perceive their families and relationships in a similar way. This corresponds to the results of Andersson (1997), who did not find significant differences between the handicapped and control groups.

Introduction

Family sculpture is related both historically and in method to psychodrama (Moreno, 1946) and to experimental exercises widely used in human relations training. Different techniques include psychodrama, which utilises the re-enactment of actual events to facilitate catharsis and social relearning for one or more of the participants, from whose life history the plot is abstracted, family photo reconnaissance, which uses family photographs, slides and movies to help the family re-experience past events, so they can appreciate current feelings and family sculpting, the therapeutic art form, in which each family member arranges the other members in a tableau, which physically symbolises their emotional relationship with one another (Ruben, 1978). Sculpture aims toward distancing the client from the emotional experience and, through this disengagement, gives new insight into complex relational determinants of past and present situations. Evidence from various fields of investigation strongly suggests that people sort out, map, and store understanding of complex interpersonal systems in which they are imbedded in the form of compressed spatial metaphors. Sculpture (also known as space sculpture, family sculpture, relationship sculpture, specialisation) is a body of techniques which enables people to tap into their metaphorical maps, to make these internal realities external, visible, and accessible to study and change. Sculpture is not a too difficult technique to learn. In a very real sense, sculpture is based on a spatio-temporal, physical "vocabulary". The most important thing for the user to do is to become at ease with and converse in this spatial "language", that is to read and speak freely in spatial metaphors and analogies. By Rechlin, Arnold and Joraschky (1993) sculpture methods are a good way to obtain

information about the real and ideal family structure. Correctly done, all such sculpture involves three stages: 1) Establishing the mapping between physical and metaphorical space 2) Constructing the sculpture 3) Processing the sculpture, or debriefing. Sculptures may be divided into three groups: 1) Simple spatialisations, 2) Boundary sculptures, 3) Family (or other system) sculptures (Constantine, 1978).

Family members have been asked to represent family characteristics by means of a variety of techniques: placing two-dimensional paper or felt figures, or stick figures or circles, or three-dimensional figures (Cromwell, Fournier & Kvebaek, 1980, Gehring and Marti, 1993) on a sheet of felt, paper, or a board. One method that is useful in marital and family diagnosis and therapy is the Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique (KFST) (1992). The KFST, the sociogram, and the life-space diagram are different ways of structurally representing a systems perspective of the person's relationships (Bothelho, Shields, Novak, 1992).

The Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique is used to map the concept of the family members regarding relations in the family and the interpersonal world of its members. Constantine (1978) says that "people sort out, map, and store understanding of the complex interpersonal systems in which they are imbedded in the form of compressed spatial metaphors."

One or more family members use wooden, stylised figurines to represent the parents and children in the family, and their interconnectedness (Kvebaek, 1992). Quantification of the results in KFST has consisted of measures of Pythagorean distances between figure placed on a chess-like board of 10 by 10 cm. squares (Cromwell et al., 1980). The separate computation of various distance scores on an ad hoc basis is time-consuming and complex, especially in large samples. The requirement, that only one figure can be placed in each square severely metrics the expression of nuances in interpersonal distances. Physical distance between figures is generally interpreted as

an index of experienced psychological distance (closeness, belongingness, cohesion, and so on) and yields meaningful and generally consistent findings (Gehring et al, 1993). An evaluation of family structure in terms of hierarchies and cross-generation coalitions has been reported by Madanes et al. (1980) who found that families of heroin addicts show weaker generation boundaries than do normal families in terms of closeness and hierarchy. In the KFST, family characteristics have also been examined in terms of dimensions like cohesion and adaptability. By Wood (1985) cohesion and hierarchy are two central dimensions of family structures. Russell (1980) found good convergent and construct validity for cohesion, and fairly stable dyadic distance test-retest scores over a 3-month period. Russell's data support the Family Sculpture Test as a useful clinical and research tool for the measurement of family cohesion but not of adaptability. Eckblad & Vandvik (1992) and Vandvik & Eckblad (1993) report on the use of the KFST in a longitudinal, psychosomatic study of children with recent onset of juvenile rheumatic disease and also in their parents.

Andersson (1997) prove that the siblings of mentally retarded children and control group children perceive their families and relationships in a similar way and there are no significant differences between the two groups. Eckblad & Vandvik (1992) and Vandvik & Eckblad (1993) report on the use of the KFST in a longitudinal, psychosomatic study of children with recent onset of juvenile rheumatic disease and also in their parents. By Eckblad and Vandvik (1992, 1993) four family configuration types were defined: close (all family members are very close to each other), hierarchic (medium close and with clear separation between parent and child systems), unspecified (medium close, not clear separation of subsystems) and skewed (relatively large and variable interpersonal distances). Differences were found between the families of parents that wished or did not wish a change of family configuration on the KFST. Findings lend support to the clinical validity of the KFST and support the usefulness of the KFST as a tool in family research.

Method

A total of 90 children, seven to ten year olds, took part in this study, 47 of them had a mentally retarded sibling and 43 formed a control group without a disabled sibling in the family.

The family size ranged in both groups from four to five members, so there were two to three children in the family. In most families there were two parents, in some of them there were stepparents. The mean age of the respondent child in the families with a disabled child was 8,68 years and in the control group 8,30 years. There was no statistical difference of age between the two groups.

The children with a disabled sister or brother were found by special schools and day care centres in Tallinn, Tartu and Pärnu and in the countryside. The children in the control group were chosen from the same school where the siblings of the disabled children studied.

Most of the tests were made during 1995 and 1996 and they were carried out in the same schools.

All children had to take the tests individually, thus they were not under the influence of parents, siblings or other persons when tested.

In this study we have used the Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique, because it is quite interesting for younger children and reflects family relations.

The Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique (KFST) is used for assessment and research purposes, and can also be used clinically in therapy. The KFST involves the use of a chessboard consisting of 10 x

10 centimetre squares and of wooden figurines. These figurines represent the different generations of the family. Each sibling places the figurines on separate boards to represent how he or she perceives the real structure of the family. Later each sibling places these figurines in their ideal family structure. The KFST uses the difference between family members' perception of their real and ideal family structure in order to work toward changing how these members organise their family.

The directions to the respondents were as follows: "These figures represent you, your mother, father and the siblings. Arrange the figures on this board according to how close you feel to one another- how close you feel to mother and father and the siblings. If you think two people feel very close, you might place the two figures right next door to each other. You can put one figure in each square." (Russell, 1980).

We computed all distances between the members of the configuration, defined as the distance between the circumference of the figurines. The output from the program consists of a written description of each family (number of children, age, sex, ranked distance from mother, father, and the geometrical centre of the family, number of children interpositioned between the parents), a data file containing 50 variables, and an order file for the statistical package SPSS/PC+.

The following distance variables are included in the present study: family mean distances (the mean of all interpersonal distances within each family), family standard deviation (the standard deviation of all interpersonal distances in each family), mother-father distance, and family mean parents-children distance (the mean of all distances between parents and children in each family).

T-test was used for comparison of independent groups.

The computations with respect to this instrument have been measured as follows:

A. The real and ideal distances

1. The distance between Ego and X, where Ego represents the tested child and X another member of the family, is computed according to the formula a2+b2=c2 (Pythagorean theorem) each square constituting one unit or point.

The value c represents the emotional distance between Ego and X. The lower this figure, the closer the family member to Ego.

2. Distance value between Ego and the family member in focus are summarised and mean scores computed for the two groups. These mean scores are compared between the disabled group and the control group with respect to both real and ideal representation.

To protect against divergence with respect to children's distribution of figurines (dolls) over the board in the two groups. The mean distance within the families has been computed excluding the disabled child and the child matched with the disabled one. The summarised mean values for these members in the disabled group and the control group respectively have been compared.

B. Distances can also be computed not only between Ego and any other person in the family, but also between dyads of other family members, for instance the distance between Mother and Disabled child (or Father and Disabled child) as the family relations are seen by Ego.

C. Distances can also be computed and compared by sexes (Andersson, 1997).

Results

Comparison between the disabled group and the control group with respect to distances between family members

There was no statistical difference between the two groups , which means that the distribution of the family members over the chess-board can be regarded as equal. (Mean values: Disabled group 3,47. Control group 3,45, p= .94). When comparing the real distance value between Ego and the other family members (Table 2) there is only one statistically significant difference between the disabled group and the control group: between Ego and oldest (child 1) siblings. There is also greater variation with respect to the mother and father in the control group according to their present experiences (real). Numerically, the children in both groups mostly wish they had a closer relationship with their parents, but siblings of mentally retarded children on the contrary wish more distant relationship with mother (Table 1).

Table 1

Ego's perceived distances between the disabled/control child, father and mother, according to Kvebaek's Family Sculpture Technique

Disabled/ control	Sibling group			Control group		
	N=47			N=43		
	Real	Ideal	Difference	Real	Ideal	Difference
child	3.43	3.29	0.14	3.26	3.14	.12
father	3.72	3.47	0.25	3.70	3.38	.32
mother	3.07	3.24	-0.17	3.66	3.57	.09

Table 2

Distances between Ego and other family members. Mean values. Real relations according to Ego

Family member	Disabled group			Control group				
	Count	Mean	S.D.	Count	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value
Father	41	3.72	2.16	42	3.70	2.17	.042	n.s
Mother	47	3.07	1.73	43	3.66	2.21	-1.42	n.s
Child 1	45	1.15	0.46	37	2.79	1.10	-8.54	<.001
Child 2	30	0.99	0.48	23	0.96	0.53	.212	n.s
HC/control	47	3.43	2.24	43	3.26	2.01	.45	n.s

Table 3

Distances between Ego and the other family members. Mean values. Ideal (or wished) relations according to Ego.

Family member	Disabled group			Control group				
	Count	Mean	S.D.	Count	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value
Father	42	3.47	2.41	42	3.38	2.32	.174	n.s
Mother	47	3.24	2.52	43	3.57	2.29	-.654	n.s
Child 1	44	3.03	1.97	37	3.15	2.28	-.248	n.s
Child 2	31	3.44	2.17	24	2.63	2.17	1.357	n.s
HC/control	47	3.29	2.09	43	3.09	2.11	0.45	n.s

Distances between the disabled child and other members in the family according to Ego. The test also gives opportunities to measure the distance between mother, father, child 1, child 2, respectively, and the disabled child, and likewise in the control group the parents and siblings respectively, and also the control child (Table 4 and 5).

Table 4

Distances between father/mother/siblings on the one hand and disabled/control child on the other hand. Mean values. Real relations according to Ego.

Family member	Disabled group			Control group				
	Count	Mean	S.D.	Count	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value
Father/HC(c)	42	3.70	2.24	41	3.69	2.17	.02	n.s
Mother/HC(c)	47	3.53	1.97	43	3.66	2.21	-.029	n.s
S1/HC(c)	35	3.79	1.83	35	3.50	1.24	.775	n.s
S2/HC(c)	34	3.64	2.11	34	3.53	1.51	.437	n.s

Table 5

Distances between father/mother/siblings on the one hand and disabled/control child on the other hand. Mean values. Ideal (or wished) relations according to Ego.

Family member	Disabled group			Control group				
	Count	Mean	S.D.	Count	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value
Father/HC(c)	42	3.22	1.83	42	3.26	1.83	-.100	n.s
Mother/HC(c)	47	3.52	2.11	43	3.28	1.83	.545	n.s
S1/HC(c)	36	3.19	1.81	36	3.20	1.89	-.02	n.s
S2/HC(c)	36	3.31	2.20	36	3.41	1.92	-.21	n.s

There is no statistically significant difference between the children's real view of these family members' relationships when comparing the disabled and the control groups. There is a relatively longer distance between the disabled child and her mother if compared with control group, but this difference is also not significant.

Distances between family members by sexes according to ego

We did not find significant differences between disabled and control families, but we found significant differences in family relations by sexes. It is clear that there are significantly greater differences in boys comparing with girl relations with fathers, mothers and in their family mean distances (table 6).

Table 6

Distances between father/mother/siblings by sexes. Mean values. Real relations according to Ego

Family member	Boys			Girls				
	Count	Mean	S.D.	Count	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value
Father/Ego	36	4.28	2.58	46	3.28	1.68	2.00	.05
Mother/Ego	38	4.21	2.40	47	2.72	1.33	3.45	.001
HC/Ego	18	3.63	2.14	24	3.75	2.36	0.343	n.s
Family mean/Ego	38	3.82	1.54	47	3.20	1.21	2.147	.05

Discussion

There was no statistical difference between the two groups, which means that the distribution of the family members over the chessboard, the disabled and control child excluded, can be regarded as equal. (Mean values: Disabled group 3.47. Control group 3.45, p=0.94). This also corresponds to the results of Andersson (1997), who did not find significant differences between handicapped and control groups. Mean values in Sweden are lower than in Estonia (Disabled group 2.68, Control group 2.81, p=0.78). Lobato et al. (1987) also found few differences between siblings of handicapped and non-handicapped children in their study comparing the interaction with their mothers, brothers and sisters.

We found some differences in distances by sexes. Boys have significantly longer distances with their fathers and mothers, family mean distance is also significantly greater.

The data presented in this study clarify the usefulness of the Family Sculpture Technique as a powerful tool for systematic assessment and treatment of families.

According to Solem and Novik (1995) this instrument reflects feelings between family members.

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